

What Women Need to Know About Cancer of the Ovaries

What are ovaries?

Ovaries are two small organs – one on each side of the uterus. The woman's eggs come from her ovaries. The ovaries make the hormones estrogen and progesterone.

What is cancer of the ovaries?

Cancer of the ovaries happens when cells in the ovaries change and grow out of control. Many types of tumors can start in the ovaries.

There are tumors that cause cancer and others that don't. Some types can also spread to other parts of the body.

Why do women get cancer of the ovaries?

No one knows for sure why some women get this cancer and others do not.

A woman has a higher chance of getting cancer of the ovaries if:

- She is middle-aged or older.
- She had trouble getting pregnant.
- She has never been pregnant or given birth.

Are there other risks?

A woman could also have a higher chance of cancer of the ovaries if:

- She has had breast cancer or colon cancer.
- She has a family member who had cancer of the breast or ovaries.
- She took estrogen without progesterone for menopause for more than 5 years.
- She is from an Eastern European Jewish background.

What can lower the chances of getting it?

No one knows how to prevent this cancer. But a few things seem to help lower the chances of getting it.

It may help a woman if:

- She has used birth control pills.
- She has given birth.
- She has had her tubes tied.
- She has had her uterus or both ovaries taken out.

What should you watch out for?

See your doctor if you have any of these changes.
Watch out if you:

- Bleed, spot, or have any discharge from the vagina that is not normal for you.
- Bleed between your periods.
- Feel pressure or pain in the lower part of your belly.
- Have back pain that gets worse over time.
- Feel bloated or your stomach gets bigger.

There are other signs you may notice. Tell your doctor if you:

- Have diarrhea or a hard time having a bowel movement.
- Have other problems that don't go away – like pain, gas, nausea or vomiting.
- Gain or lose weight without trying.
- Have trouble eating.
- Feel full quickly or without eating.
- Need to urinate right away or more often.

These signs could be caused by something else. Check with your doctor to be sure. Don't wait. Your health is important.

You can make a difference!

This cancer is often found when women notice changes and tell the doctor.

- Know what is normal for your body. If you notice changes, see your doctor.
- If you have family members with cancer of the breast or ovaries, ask about genetic testing. You might be tested for a gene that may cause cancer of the ovaries.

What tests or exams might be done?

The only way to find this cancer is to have a physical and pelvic exam. The doctor can feel for changes in the ovaries that might be a tumor.

- If a tumor is found, a biopsy may be needed to see if it is cancer.
- The doctor takes a sample of tissue or fluid to check for cancer cells.

What if cancer is found?

There are many ways to treat this cancer. Treatment may include surgery and chemotherapy. The earlier it is treated, the better.

- To find out more, ask your doctor.
- Tell your doctor if you have any signs or symptoms.
- Ask your doctor any questions you have about your health.

Take good care of yourself for you and for your loved ones!

To learn more, visit:

- U.S. Preventive Services Task Force
www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org
- CDC Inside Knowledge Campaign
www.cdc.gov
- National Cancer Institute
www.cancer.gov/cancer
- National Library of Medicine
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov